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Plenty of rebates in Coalition health policy but where is the reform?

Medicare rebate increases for general practice are not the answer to *reforming* the health system and dealing with problems of access and inequality, Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair, Dr Emil Djakic, said today.

"The Coalition's plan to 'Boost GP Services' offers more of the same – an inequitable and biased health system that fails to address the service needs of the country's most vulnerable – the rural regional areas of Australia, Aboriginal Torres Strait Island populations, the ageing sector and the socially disadvantaged," Dr Djakic said.

"This plan lacks vision and a comprehensive strategy to shift the emphasis of Australia's health care system from the hospital system to the primary health care sector.

"Increasing rebates is an attractive solution for doctors and we welcome that, as well as the commitment to rationalising and simplifying the system. However, it's an over-arching strategy and clear direction for primary health care that is missing," he said.

"But higher rebates do not represent *reform* and will not change the fragmented, disjointed care that confronts patients when they navigate the current health system.

"They also don't fix up the inequities found in the current Medicare system where we know that Medicare funding is higher in areas of higher socio-economic status and lower in those areas where people are poorer, have lower access to services, and generally worse health outcomes.

"That means increasing rebates favours higher income earners ahead of those who need access to care the most – pensioners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people living in rural and remote areas.

"Access to comprehensive general practice is an essential component of an effective health system which includes acute and chronic disease management, health maintenance and preventive health care.

"However, a health system that is fundamentally reformed to maximise its primary health care services through general practice can alleviate our over-stretched hospital system and provide more joined up, coordinated care.

"What we need is real reform, a reorientation of the health system to primary health care, and the establishment of primary health care organisations to plan and ensure the local community gets better access to the right services in the right time and the right place," Dr Djakic said.

For media interviews: ph Karen Warner, Media Adviser on 02 6228 0819/0438 179 520